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REPORT ON PROGRESS OF AL-RAHAD AGRICULTURAL PROJECT

Khartoum AL-AYYAM in Arabic 21 Feb 83 p 5

[Article by Karamallah al-Siddiq: "The al-Rahad Project Sets New Production Records"]

[Text] Proposal for a nationwide discussion concerning making sorghum seed available in order to achieve abundant sorghum production.

The al-Rahad agricultural project, during the last agricultural season, achieved a very high agricultural output in an area of 280,000 feddans planted with peanuts, cotton, sorghum, orchard and garden crops, and forest trees. During the festivities held by the project's administration to celebrate the production achievements, the administration promised to set production records during this season.

The question now is: How closely do the facts correspond to the promise which was made, and has the administration been successful in coordinating its factors of production such as fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigation?

Has [the administration] managed to overcome the obstacles which limit production such as animals which wander onto the agricultural lands and the whitefly? Has it provided a sufficient work force for the agricultural season? Has it made sufficient provisions for transporting the cotton from the fields to the cotton gins? Has it made it possible to do sufficient cotton-ginning?

Reasons for the Increase in Production

AL-AYYAM talked to Mr Salah al-Eshaykh Bashir, deputy agricultural director of al-Rahad Agricultural Corporation. He told us that agricultural work is the type of work which is very hard and exhausting, and requires that one put out continual effort throughout the year.

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The Jumayyil people had enormous resources at their disposal in comparison with their numerical strength. During the past two or three decades the Jumayyil family built its economic strength steadily by penetrating areas considered in western countries to be part of organized crime. Prostitution, drugs, protection money, and smuggling contributed substantially to the rise of the family on the social ladder in Lebanon.

He said: "The al-Rahad project follows the two-part crop rotation system, with the following crops being planted: 140,000 feddans of cotton, 65,000 feddans of sorghum, 65,000 feddans of peanuts, 6,000 feddans of orchard and garden crops, and 6,000 feddans of forest trees."

He went on to say: "Cotton is [normally] planted on 135,000 feddans. But as a result of the heavy rains last August, the area of land planted with cotton now is only 116,000 feddans. We expect the average total production per feddan to be 6.5 kantars [1 kantar = 44.93 kg], as compared with 6.1 kantars during the last season. The reason for this is that the average cotton harvest by last January totalled 3.5 kantars per feddan, as compared with 2 kantars per feddan last year."

He said that he expected the northern area to be the area which would be the most productive one. He also mentioned the factors responsible for the high production of cotton: "Our administration has pursued a new policy, which is that of having the farmers hire their own cotton-pickers after the financial resources to do this have been provided to them. A total of 14 Sudanese pounds per farmer was spent for every feddan planted with cotton. Of this amount, 10 Sudanese pounds were spent before the beginning of the crop season, and the remaining 4 Sudanese pounds were spent after the cotton workers had been brought to the fields.

"In addition to this, the work of preparing the fields—both the tilling of the ground and the irrigation—was accomplished very efficiently.

"In addition to this, the rains were not heavy during July. This is something which helped the crop to grow. Also, herbicides were effectively used over large areas.

"The human element was a factor in contributing toward the success of this crop season because the cotton-pickers pooled their efforts and worked well together, the farmers' efficiency is on a higher level, and the farmers are more interested in their fields and their crops. Perhaps the reason for this is that the crops have started providing a higher income for them. Last season the farmers received a combined total income of 13 million Sudanese pounds, and this meant a minimum profit of 1,000 Sudanese pounds even for each of the farmers who produced the least.

"Even before all of this, we succeeded in containing and exterminating the crop pests, especially the whitefly.

"Furthermore, the corporation has drawn up a complete plan for protecting the crops from animals which wander onto the agricultural lands and from unfair grazing practices with these animals. In addition to this, great efforts were undertaken in which the members of the armed forces participated and were stationed at both stationary and mobile observation points."

Concerning the cotton-ginning situation, Mr al-Fatih Sulayman, the man in charge of the cotton gins, said the following:

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Military Intelligence Branch Prefers Haddad

Along with the deepening of the ties of the Mossad with the Falangists, an unwritten pact, modest in its dimensions, was developing between Major Haddad and the State of Israel. The stability of the Orthodox Christian Major in the face of PLO

"The Maintenance and Operations Department, last January, finished getting our four cotton gins in shape. They have already started to work at full capacity, and by the end of January they had processed 32,176 bales of cotton and 191,351 bushels of cottonseed. We expect to have the cotton gins process the entire crop by the middle of next June.

"The cotton-ginning area has so far received 180,427 sacks of cotton, and the gins have processed 121,984 sacks of this total. The administration realized that it was necessary to quickly transport the picked cotton from the fields to the cotton gins. This task was entrusted to a number of contractors rather than to a single contractor, as has been the practice previously."

Mr Bashir then commented: "The project administration right now is concentrating on tilling the ground which was planted with sorghum and peanuts. We expect the tilling operations to be finished by next July. The reason for this delay is that the plows are not working with high efficiency because their useful life is over.

"The administration is engaged in the process of putting up the crop preparation operations for the 1983 and 1984 seasons for public bidding to the private sector."

More Peanuts Grown

Mr Bashir went on to say: "The farmers stopped growing peanuts because of the fluctuation in the prices of peanuts. In fact, the price of peanuts went down to 6 Sudanese pounds per kantar. But in spite of this, we prepared 65,000 feddans for the growing of peanuts between 20 May and the end of June. But unfortunately, due to irrigation problems which were connected with having our electric power cut off, the total area utilized for producing peanuts decreased to 50,000 feddans. But in spite of this, production per feddan was 8 tons, as compared with 6 tons during the last season. The reason for this is that 50 percent of the crop was harvested by means of mechanized harvesting, and both stationary and mobile harvesting methods were used. Stationary harvesting cost 20 Sudanese pounds and mobile harvesting cost 14 Sudanese pounds [per feddan].

"I hope that during the next season the farmers will devote themselves to planting peanuts since the price per bushel of peanuts has risen to 12 Sudanese pounds. Also, we have contacted the Oil-Bearing Seeds Company to ask it to provide credit to the farmers. But it appeared to the company that this would cause the raising of the labor costs, whereas it could not guarantee that the farmers would deliver all of the crops they produce or that they would be concerned about sorting out the bad peanuts from their crops. This is something which increased the indebtedness of the corporation to millions of Sudanese pounds because the farmers were not repaying the debts on time.

"Talking about peanuts always involves talking about sorghum, for which 65,000 feddans have been set aside and of which 50,000 feddans are actually

being used to produce sorghum. Total production was 500,000 bushels, with the average production per feddan being from 1 to 1.2 kantars. This production figure was the result of all the efforts made by the farmers since they feel that their standard of living is connected with this vital crop. Also, this crop does not require much crop preparation other than tilling the ground at certain times.

"Since we believe in the importance of sorghum and in increasing our planting and production of it, we propose that this question be discussed on a nationwide level and that better sorghum seed be provided to the farmers and that this be guaranteed by means of financing by the Bank of Sudan, which demands that it be repaid the loans plus the interest payments on the loans owed to it.

"This proposal stems from a basic and clear position adopted by the corporation which is fully on the side of the farmers so that they will come up with abundant production. The corporation utilizes all of the loans provided to it in order to achieve its goals. Such loans are, for example, loans from the Kuwaiti, Saudi, and Arab development banks which were used to purchase agricultural machinery and equipment as well as a number of cars and trucks.

"To complete the picture concerning the project, one must mention the fact that 6,000 feddans have been set aside for orchard and garden crops. The reason for this is that the al-Rahad area is one of the most important agricultural areas which supply Wad Madani and al-Qadarif with garden and orchard crops such as onions, tomatoes, and fruit.

"Another 6,000 feddans have been set aside for growing forest trees. A total of 400 feddans have been planted with camphor trees. We are getting help from the Finns, and the results of this aid will soon be seen. Our project is going to bring in these [Finnish] experts for a period of 2 years and utilize their expertise in the field of forestry. We are planning to plant extensive areas of land with camphor trees."

Obstacles to Production

Mr Bashir concluded his remarks by referring to the obstacles which limit productivity by the project. He said: "The first obstacle is the fact that we lack tractors. Furthermore, we do not have spare parts for those that we have. In addition to this, their useful life is over, and as we utilize these tractors we are afraid that they are going to break down.

"Also, we are always having electric power problems, especially during the times when we require electricity in order to pump the water out onto the fields. This is something which forces us to decrease the area of land set aside for planting our crops.

"But our basic problem is the fact that so many of our trained employees and skilled workers such as our mechanics and technicians are constantly leaving their jobs because they are being attracted by employment

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opportunities which provide more income or quicker profits. This is something which results in lower production.

"What we must do is to think together how to overcome these obstacles in order to have al-Rahad achieve record production which will both satisfy our ambitions and be in conformity with our aspirations."

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